UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General arrives in Ghana on four-day official visit; meets with Presidential Adviser and senior Government officials.

* General Assembly calls on all States to promote objectives of Zone of Peace and Cooperation in South Atlantic.

* Secretary-General pays tribute to United Nations personnel for devoted efforts in service of peace in former Yugoslavia.

* Secretary-General proposes new approach to voter identification in Western Sahara; says process could be completed within four months.

* Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee hears statements on human rights situations in Iraq and Haiti.

* UNHCR expresses concern over increasing use of detention for asylum-seekers in Europe; urges States to respect principles of international protection.

* Legal Committee approves draft resolutions on relations with Host Country, international law assistance programme, and Decade of International Law.

* WFP sends emergency shipment of rice to Democratic People's Republic of Korea following recent floods.

* United States pledges $5 million to UNICEF on behalf of children of former Yugoslavia.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali arrived yesterday in Accra for a four-day official visit to Ghana. In a press conference at the airport, he stated that his visit was aimed at reinforcing relations between Ghana and the United Nations. He also wished to express his gratitude to President Jerry Rawlings for his important role in the Liberian peace process and to discuss how to maintain the momentum of the process so that peace, security and development prevailed not only in Liberia, but in the region.

(more)

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Today, the Secretary-General visited the Kwame Nkrumah mausoleum, where he laid a wreath. He said his presence was an expression of respect for the memory of President Nkrumah, whom he had known personally. He added that it was only through African unity and solidarity that the problems of Africa could be overcome.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali later met with the Presidential Adviser on Governmental Affairs, Paul Victor Obeng, who led a delegation of senior Ghanaian officials. They discussed the situation in Liberia, including the role played by the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG), and the situation in Sierra Leone. The Secretary-General expressed his gratitude for Ghana's support of the United Nations and in particular its role in peace-keeping.

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The General Assembly today called on all States to cooperate in promoting the objectives of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic, and to refrain from actions which might create or aggravate tensions in the region. The Assembly requested the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to render all appropriate assistance which States of the zone might seek in their joint efforts to implement the Declaration of the Zone. It took that action by a resolution adopted by 124 votes in favour to none against, with the United States abstaining.

Also today, the Assembly took up the subject of the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin. The representative of Iraq said the sanctions imposed against his country and foreign intervention in its affairs had led to large-scale expropriation of Iraqi artifacts. He called on the international community to stop such acts and to ensure the restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin.

Khmer art objects had been subjected to unprecedented pillaging and vandalism, and the danger to them was growing day by day, according to the representative of Cambodia. He called on the international community to declare illegal the importation, exportation or transfer of Khmer cultural goods; to stop national museums and related institutions from acquiring Cambodian antiquities; and to institute the necessary measures to help the Cambodian Government recover illegally exported objects from dealers.

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The Secretary-General has said that he is not yet in a position to recommend definitive changes in the structure of the United Nations presence in the former Yugoslavia. In a report to the Security Council dated 23 November, he noted that important decisions had yet to be taken regarding the

implementation of the Peace Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Basic Agreement on Eastern Slavonia. He added that he would revert to the Council as soon as the situation was sufficiently clear.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali paid tribute to former Special Representative Yasushi Akashi, Special Envoy Thorvald Stoltenberg, and Force Commander Bernard Janvier for their devoted efforts in the service of peace in the former Yugoslavia. He also commended the chiefs of mission, military commanders and personnel of the three United Nations missions in the region.

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The identification of voters in Western Sahara has virtually come to a halt in the last few weeks and a new approach is needed to carry the process forward, according to the Secretary-General. In a report to the Security Council dated 24 November, he said the basic obstacle to progress related to certain tribal groups and to persons not resident in the Territory. The identification process involved the participation of a sheikh, or alternate, from the Moroccan Government and the Frente POLISARIO. However, the parties were either unable or unwilling to make sheikhs available at given times and places.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali proposed that when two sheikhs were present, one from each side, identification would take place as usual. When one party did not, for whatever reason, provide a sheikh, identification would take place on the basis of appropriate documentation, with the assistance of the one sheikh present. If neither party made a sheikh available, identification would be based on documentary evidence only. The Settlement Plan provided for the lodging of appeals against the inclusion or exclusion of any names on the list of eligible voters established by the Identification Commission.

If identification were allowed to proceed without interruption, 12 centres should be able to complete the process within four months, at a rate of 36,000 applicants per month, the Secretary-General said. "Should it fail to proceed with the necessary speed, it will be my intention, as requested by the Security Council in its resolution 1017 (1995), to present for the consideration of the Council alternative options, including the possibility of MINURSO's withdrawal."

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The Government of Iraq alone is preventing the sale of billions of dollars of oil which could finance badly needed imports of food and medicines, according to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iraq, Max Van der Stoel. He told the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) on Friday that an oppressive atmosphere still prevailed in Iraq and that cruel and inhumane punishments were used.

The Independent Expert on Haiti, Adama Dieng, called for support for the reform of that country's judicial system, noting that recent violence had claimed at least seven lives. A lack of trust in the judicial system had caused people to take the law into their own hands. He said it was essential to implement the recommendations contained in his report in order to keep the situation from escalating.

The Secretary-General's Special Representative on internally displaced persons, Francis Deng, said that when a State could not ensure the protection and well-being of its people, the international community had the commensurate responsibility to hold it accountable and to obtain access to provide the needed protection and assistance. The international community should address the issues of causes, consequences and remedies, basing its response on prevention, protection and assistance.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has expressed concern over the increasing use of detention for asylum-seekers in Europe. In a report on the issue, it said that asylum-seekers were being detained for weeks, months and even years while awaiting decisions on their claims or access to the asylum procedure. The report called on States to ensure that measures aimed at discouraging the abuse of asylum procedures should have no detrimental effect on the fundamental principles of international protection, including on the institution of asylum.

UNHCR's Director for Europe, John Horekens, acknowledged that many would-be migrants were abusing asylum channels to seek economic or other opportunities in Europe. However, he stressed that governments "must make the necessary distinction between the situation of refugees and asylum-seekers and that of other aliens. This distinction should be reflected in national aliens and asylum law."

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The Sixth Committee (Legal) has approved a draft resolution that would have General Assembly urge the Host Country to consider lifting travel controls on certain diplomatic missions and Secretariat staff members of certain nationalities. The Assembly would express the hope that the host country would continue to take necessary measures to prevent interference with the functioning of diplomatic missions. It would also approve a series of recommendations of the Host Country Committee regarding the problem of diplomatic indebtedness.

The Sixth Committee also approved a draft on the United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law. That text would have the Assembly authorize the Secretary-

General to provide fellowships and scholarships in international law in 1996 and 1997, and to provide travel grants to participants from developing counties for regional courses.

By the terms of a draft resolution on the United Nations Decade of International Law, the General Assembly would express its appreciation for the work done on the Decade. It would also express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for the successful organization of the United Nations Congress on Public International Law.

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The World Food Programme (WFP) has sent an emergency shipment of rice to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for distribution to 500,000 people left destitute by recent floods. The initial shipment of 5,140 tons of rice represents the first United Nations food aid ever sent to the country. The WFP will provide a total of 20,250 tons of rice and 675 tons of vegetable oil, enough to feed half million Koreans for 90 days.

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The United States has pledged $5 million to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on behalf of the children of the former Yugoslavia. The pledge was announced today by President Bill Clinton at a special ceremony at the White House. The money will go towards accelerating immunization and education programmes in the former Yugoslavia, as part of the rehabilitation process following the Dayton Peace Agreement.

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